

Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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EQUITIES IN THE SOVIET-GUINEAN RELATIONSHIP

Summary

Despite a general downturn in bilateral ties since the mid-1970s, both Moscow and Conakry have a strong interest in sustaining a working relationship. The Guineans in particular have expressed a sense of vulnerability in the event Moscow ended its involvement with Guinea's mining and fishing industries. Similarly, the Guinean military, which is largely equipped with Soviet weaponry, is dependent upon the USSR for spare parts and technical services. For its part, Moscow has become increasingly dependent on the airfield at Conakry for providing military support to the beleaguered MPLA in Angola. Nonetheless, the USSR could find other, albeit less convenient, means to maintain its support effort in Luanda. [redacted]

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Introduction

Soviet-Guinean relations date back to 1958, when the USSR quickly moved to exploit the opportunities afforded by France's total cutoff of aid to the leftist regime of the late President Sekou Toure. The relationship grew closer in the 1970s, as Sekou Toure became increasingly concerned about security threats to his regime. As security tensions subsided, however, the Guinean leader became increasingly disenchanted with his Soviet benefactors, who, he felt, were providing little economic assistance while pressing him for additional concessions and access to facilities. Since Sekou Toure ended Soviet TU-95 reconnaissance flights from Conakry in 1977 relations have been generally cool but correct. This memorandum will discuss the current equities in the Soviet-Guinean relationship and assess the likelihood of a drastic shift--positive or negative--in bilateral ties. [redacted]

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This paper was prepared by [redacted] Office of Soviet Analysis in response to a request from Edward Van Gilder, Chief, West Africa Bureau, Department of State. It was coordinated with the Office of African and Latin American Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Third World Division, SOVA, [redacted]

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Guinean Equities and Vulnerabilities

Military Assistance: Moscow continues to be Guinea's primary source of military equipment and training. Since 1958, the USSR has committed some \$188.5 million in military aid, of which \$60 million was free or discounted, while credits were issued for the remainder. Most of this aid was dispersed during the 1960s and 1970s and included MIG 21 fighter aircraft, tanks, MI-8 helicopters, transport aircraft, small arms, ammunition and radars. Some 200 Soviet military advisers provided maintenance assistance in support of this equipment. In 1978, Sekou Toure ordered a reduction in the Soviet presence--to some two dozen--and the current number of advisers is about fifty. [redacted]

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While Conakry may attempt to diversify its arms inventory, it seems unlikely that it will drastically reduce its dependence on Soviet arms.

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[redacted]

Economic Assistance: On the economic front, Moscow has committed some \$236 million in economic assistance since the late 1950s, of which \$222 million has been drawn. However, Moscow has made no new commitments since 1980. The Soviet Union nonetheless continues to play a significant role in the Guinean economy through its involvement in the Guinean bauxite and fishing industries. In addition, Soviet doctors, teachers, scientists, and technicians--numbering between 325 and 450--also make a valuable contribution to the local infrastructure, and many students go to Soviet universities on full scholarships. [redacted]

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Moscow's heaviest investment in the Guinean economy has been the Kindia bauxite project--which represents almost half (\$116 million) of Moscow's total economic aid commitments to Guinea. Following their initial land surveys in 1968, the Soviets financed the entire project, including construction of the mine, the railroad, port, terminal facilities to the coast, and related infrastructure. Soviet technicians remain to assist in the operation and training of locals, though most of the mine is staffed by Guineans. Under the terms of a 12-year accord signed in 1976:

-- 40 percent of annual planned production of bauxite goes to the USSR as a direct loan payment.

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- 50 percent of the bauxite is sold to the USSR under contract. While Moscow pays in hard currency, we believe most of these funds go directly to repay its large debt to the USSR for military aid, and other services.
- 10 percent is available to Guinea for sale on the open market, though there is little evidence that it has done so in the past.

In recent years, the USSR has been receiving some two million metric tons of bauxite from Kindia. This represents about 14 percent of Guinea's total exports (valued at \$411 million in 1982.) [REDACTED]

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The Soviets have also played a key role in expanding Guinea's fish industry. Since 1959, they have extended credits and services worth \$11.8 million. This support has gone into the construction of cold storage plants, dock and repair facilities, trawlers, port machinery and a hydrographic research ship. According to the terms of the 1982 fishing accord--which has been informally extended pending a renegotiation of terms--the USSR is obligated to sell some 10,000 tons of its catch to Conakry for hard currency which must be paid in advance in dollars. This accord has been a frequent source of bilateral frictions, as the Soviets have overfished (putting some 50-70 ships fish in Guinean waters rather than the stipulated 10), unilaterally raised their prices and frequently failed to fulfill their obligation to provide various technical services and repairs. [REDACTED]

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More important than the actual dollar amounts of Soviet aid to Guinea--and the real source of Moscow's leverage over Guinean policy--is Conakry's perception of its dependence on the USSR and the way the Soviets have ensconced themselves in certain key sections of the economy. The Soviets have not hesitated to exploit the Guineans' sense of vulnerability over the past five years:


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- In early 1984 when negotiations on renewing the Soviet-Guinean fishing agreement reached an impasse, the Soviets stopped fish deliveries to Conakry for several months. Given its dependence on these deliveries, the Guinean government had little choice but to extend indefinitely the old fishing agreement. 


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Thus, while Moscow gives very little "economic assistance" to Guinea per se, the government would probably be reluctant to face the economic consequences of a complete break with Moscow:

A slowdown--or possible halt--in the Kindia mine operation following a cutoff of Soviet spare parts and machinery. (The USSR, at a minimum, would threaten such a cutoff as a way of ensuring continued debt payments from Guinea.)

- A food shortage in Conakry following termination of Soviet fish deliveries.
- A possible decline in revenues from bauxite sales; even if the Kindia operation were unaffected, Guinea would have to market the approximately 2 million tons of bauxite sent to the USSR last year--a task complicated by the fact that Kindia bauxite is a low-grade ore and is much less desirable on world markets. Moscow for its part, is not dependent on Guinean bauxite, as there are ample alternative sources; the USSR signed a seven year bauxite purchase accord with Jamaica in 1982. In any event, the revenues would still be going largely to the USSR for debt repayment. 

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Apart from economic considerations, Conakry could face new problems in the military area if it broke with Moscow. Lack of spare parts and services for Soviet hardware and aircraft might cause disgruntlement in some military circles. Moscow presumably has some supporters in the military; some 920 Guineans have had military training in the USSR. Even if the military believed the break with Moscow was necessary, it would be unlikely to find new sources for military aid and equipment quickly. This, in turn, could lead to charges that the defense and security of the country were not being maintained. 

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Moscow's Stake

During the early 1970s, the Soviets gained access to Guinean air and naval facilities, largely because of their willingness to help Sekou Toure fend off security threats. Following commando raids from neighboring Portuguese Guinea in 1970, for example, Moscow deployed several ships to Guinea in response to a request from Sekou Toure. This initial presence became a near permanent Soviet West African naval patrol, supported by Soviet auxiliary ships in Conakry. In July 1973, Soviet TU-95 reconnaissance aircraft began periodic deployments to Conakry, allegedly to monitor nearby Guinean exile camps, but actually to monitor US naval activities in the Atlantic. Sekou Toure's decision to halt TU-95 access in 1977 limited--but did not eliminate--Soviet reconnaissance capabilities near the mouth of the Mediterranean; TU-95s currently deployed from Luanda can only cover that region for about half the time--4 hours--that they could when based in Conakry. [REDACTED]

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Despite the downturn in bilateral relations since 1977, Moscow still derives important military and economic benefits from its dealings with Guinea. As the security situation in Angola has deteriorated over the past two years, the Soviets have become more dependent on Conakry airfield to support their military presence in Luanda. Loss of access to Guinea would complicate such resupply, as it would take time for Moscow to upgrade facilities in other states such as Mali, Benin, or Ghana--assuming they are willing to grant such rights. In the short-term, the Soviets would have to run supply flights to Angola down the east coast of Africa. This route, however, raises possible overflight problems, as it passes over either Turkey or Pakistan--both of which have denied such clearances on some occasions in the past. Nonetheless, this would be the most likely alternative route if Guinea refused to grant Moscow continued access in Conakry. [REDACTED]

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Moscow also derives financial benefits from its involvement in Guinea's fish and bauxite industries. While we cannot calculate how much fishing is done by the flotilla of Soviet ships in Guinean waters, much of the catch goes directly to Soviet consumers, and the surplus is sold for foreign exchange. Moreover, the fishing enterprise gives the Soviets access to Guinean onshore facilities for their fishing fleet. [REDACTED]

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The Kindia bauxite operation produces about one-eighth of Moscow's annual bauxite needs, primarily for aluminum production and its related defense applications. The Soviets recognize that Guinea's debt payments will have to come largely through these deliveries of bauxite, as well as some diamonds. [REDACTED]

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Overview

Moscow has little interest in altering the present state of relations with Guinea. Given Moscow's increased dependence on Conakry for air access to support the regime in Luanda, it is unlikely that the Soviets would press any contentious issues to the point of wrecking their relationship with Guinea. The USSR's main concern is to retain its air and naval access to ensure a rapid air delivery capability for military transports en route to Angola. Moscow also wants to continue receiving Guinean bauxite, both to recover its debt and to stockpile this important mineral for use in Soviet industry. [REDACTED]

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For its part, Conakry probably fears the potential economic and social dislocation following a Soviet pullout from Guinea. Grumbling in the military, fish shortages in Conakry, and a slow-down of the bauxite operation at Kindia could create political instability and new opportunities for civilian coup-plotting or a military takeover. Unless assured of the immediate military, economic, technical and food support to overcome the potential problems that could develop in the wake of a Soviet pullout, Conakry, as it did in the recent fish renegotiations, would presumably back away from any situation which could prompt a complete break in ties with the USSR. [REDACTED]

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